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# THE SCHOOL REVIEW

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## EDUCATIONAL ADVERTISING

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Inasmuch as parents furnish the raw material for the teachers' experiments, bear most of the expense of conducting those experiments, and are forced to live with the results, it seems only just that they should be given reasonable consideration by those who manage our schools. To be sure, parents are considered, and to a certain extent "catered to," by both colleges and public schools. In the nature of the case they must be, because they pay the bills. Certainly in the majority of our schools, however, it would seem that no intelligent effort is being made to bring the parent into a real understanding of and sympathy with the actual school work.

A considerable portion of the pupils in our public schools are, of course, the children of parents who have not had a liberal or even a common-school education. These parents send their children to school because they hope for their children better things than they themselves have had, or, too often perhaps, for the reason that the law requires it. This is as it should be. In fact, the percentage of children of any given grade who are receiving more advanced instruction than their parents ever received may be taken as a fair index of the real growth of our public-school system.

This very condition, however, creates the disadvantage of a lack of common understanding and co-operation between the school and the home. It would seem that this ought to place clearly

before school authorities the duty of educating not only the student but the parent to an appreciation of the value and importance of the sort of training for which the schools stand. Quite the opposite policy is commonly pursued. It almost seems at times as if teachers regarded the average parent as a hopeless person, quite incapable of interest in or understanding of the real aims of education: an individual to be cajoled into patronage by an array of non-essentials and extraneous activities.

All too often, in fact, student activities are encouraged, or at least permitted, by teachers who fully realize their uselessness, or even harmfulness, because such activities are supposed to interest the parents. Take, for instance, the high-school graduation, or "commencement," as it is now styled. Teachers and school officials generally are pretty well convinced of the injuriousness of this function, so far as the students are concerned. Teachers realize that this annual ceremony, with its attendant array of class pins, class yells, class books, class plays, and class receptions, is hardly beneficial to the student. The expense is greater than many families ought to bear; the final term of the "Senior" year, when the student is best able to make most progress and to get real enjoyment from his studies, is almost entirely given over to preparation for the grand event. So much emphasis on the end of a course, too, cannot fail to make more prominent the fact that there is a break, and so to reduce the number of those going to college. Its effects are still more pernicious in the grammar schools, where the solemnity of the occasion and a beribboned diploma lend emphasis to the fact that a course has been "finished."

Yet all this is tolerated by teachers because the "parents" expect it. Do not teachers understand parents well enough to know that they will appear in large numbers at any sort of function in which their children are concerned, no matter how slight their approval? Again, has the possibility never occurred to our teachers that parents may attend such displays because it is the only opportunity offered for getting at all in touch with the schools?

It should not be inferred, however, that it is always, or perhaps usually, against the better judgment of the teacher that these spectacular activities are carried on. Often teachers seem only

too willing to lend their own energies to the encouragement and execution of these activities. Sometimes it seems teachers consider these things more important than the work they are hired to do.

Some time ago a teacher in an eastern high school argued in defense of school "plays" that pupils and parents derived therefrom "common interest and mutual sympathy." She admitted that the plays were not, in her school, the kind that would be of real value to the pupils. "They were unfinished, too hurriedly prepared, and not even well memorized." Yet she found their beneficial effects in the "mutual sympathy" gained by the pupils and parents. It may be possible to consider seriously, as a source of mutual sympathy between father and son, a cheap drama by some unknown writer, even though the father be a spectator and the son play the leading rôle in an "unfinished manner," his part "hurriedly prepared and not even well memorized."

Might not some more firm bond of mutual sympathy, however, be found, if an equal amount of time and effort were expended by teachers, pupils, and parents, in some way in which the parents could be brought to realize the nature and importance of the work of the school? Perhaps at the same time the question of the co-operation of the school and the home would become less vexing. At least our high schools would be presented to the public in some other guise than as centers for the encouragement of third-rate amateur theatricals. The present methods of keeping the public in touch with schools, by means of activities having at best but a very slight connection with even the less important phases of education, savor too much of misrepresentation.

Our colleges are by no means exempt from this type of misrepresentation. Recently the writer visited one of the best of the smaller colleges in the Mississippi Valley. He was shown a collection of books, the library of a distinguished man of letters, purchased at considerable expense and occupying a prominent place in the library. The books were interesting as curiosities and because of their association with a leader of thought in the last century. For the average undergraduate they were absolutely worthless. "Great thing to show parents," said the Latin professor, with a wave of his hand.

The writer, with several fellow-students, was selected some time ago to inflict a "thesis" upon the audience at the commencement exercises of a small eastern college. He protested. The essay had been written on a line which happened to be his hobby that year. The subject was too big for anyone to handle, even an undergraduate. Even to its author the paper appeared incapable of interesting the people who would be crowded into uncomfortable church pews in the middle of a hot June day. "No one would listen." "Everyone would be bored." All this was admitted by members of the faculty. "We know it will not interest your classmates," a patient professor explained; "the alumni won't listen either; in fact, they will make so much noise in the back of the hall that no one else can hear. But this isn't for them, anyway; this is for the parents. They will listen, and, though they can't understand, they will say, 'That boy was worth educating.'" Such is the esteem in which some of our college professors hold their patrons.

Colleges are, however, a bit aside from our theme. Many colleges are private corporations anyway; and perhaps we ought not to protest if their advertising methods are not more scrupulously honest than those of other corporations. But we have a right to expect something better from our public schools. Our schools are, either intentionally or otherwise, expending a considerable amount of time and energy in trying to interest the public, that is, in advertising. They should continue to do so. Schools can grow in real influence only as increasing numbers of citizens come to realize and appreciate the importance of their work. Why, then, should all the effort to interest parents in school work be expended in fields in no way connected with that work?

The business of the school, as a school, is to teach. As a body of young people it should, perhaps, have social and athletic interests, but as a school its business is found, and its interests should be found, in the studies of the curriculum. Then why is its advertising not found there also? The present situation is not unlike that of a firm manufacturing a standard line of hardware and cutlery, who, while striving to continue their old line of business, put all their

advertising into a fancy line of tissue-paper specialties and post-cards for the Christmas trade. It is, in fact, a misrepresentation by our school-teachers of the line of goods they are supposed to be carrying; and if the schools could be brought under the pure-food law the package would be properly labeled. Bogus advertising does not pay in the long run in the commercial world. Is it certain that it really pays in the educational world?

It is not the writer's purpose to enter here into the question of the relative values of cultural and industrial education. It is merely offered as a suggestion that the rapidly increasing popularity of industrial and technical schools may be largely due to the fact that the attention of outsiders is called to the real work of the school, rather than to unrelated activities, so that the public generally is brought to feel that here is a school which is doing work that it is not ashamed to talk about. Might it not be more profitable, as it would certainly be more honest, for our teachers of cultural subjects to insist on the importance of their own work, as compared with class histories, trips to Washington, and amateur dramatics?

Such a condition as the present must have its attendant evils. It fosters lack of sympathy between the schools and the homes; thus making the work of the school harder through lack of co-operation. It gives the impression that the actual work of the school is not very important, that it is not considered important even by those who have it in charge. Thus there is bred contempt for the schools, which too often prevents the larger appropriations that the schools might have and ought to have, and restrains parents from making the effort they might make to keep their children in school.

It is natural, however, that the injurious effects of such a system should be most serious and far-reaching upon the teaching force itself. Such persistent ignoring of the real work of the teacher cannot fail to react unfavorably upon the quality of the teaching. If what the teacher is hired to do never in any way comes under the observation of outsiders, the public is forced to judge its teachers wholly from the extraneous activities carried on for its benefit. And teachers, being human and in search of popularity and a raise

in salary, will bend their energies in the direction of the spectacular advertising activities.

What the effect of an opposite policy might be may perhaps be judged from its results in a slightly different field of educational effort. It is pretty generally recognized that the work of the football coach, considered merely as teaching, is far superior to the work of either the college professor or the public-school teacher. Is not a potent reason for this found in the fact that the standing of the football coach is determined just exactly by the results of his teaching? He is rated, not by what he himself can do in some outside activity, as in the case of the college professor; nor by what he can make his pupils do in some outside activity, as in the case of the public-school teacher; but by what he can make his pupils do in the particular line he is supposed to be teaching. Strangely enough, he alone is judged by the actual results of the work for which all three are hired.